THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT (SHRIMATI RENUKA CHOWDHURY): (a) The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme implemented through the State Governments/UT Administrations.

(b) The ICDS Scheme envisages the Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) and Helpers (AWHs) as honorary workers from the local community. The honoraria being paid to Anganwadi Workers out of grant-in-aid released by the Government of India ranges from Rs. 938/- to Rs.1063/- per month, depending upon their qualifications and experience. Anganwadi Helpers are paid an honorarium of Rs. 500/- per month. Some States are also paying additional honorarium/ monetary incentives to Anganwadi Workers/Helpers out of their own resources for additional work assigned to them from time to time.

(c) Yes, Sir.

(d) Since AWWs are honorary workers and not government employees, the question of "retirement" does not arise. However, their honorary services can be discontinued on attainment of a particular age. The question of fixing that age has been left to State Governments/UT Administrations to take an appropriate view in the matter.

(e) to (g) Being honorary workers and in view of the very nature of the role of Anganwadi Workers and Helpers in ICDS Scheme, no pension or gratuity is admissible to them. However, Government of India is fully conscious of the significance of the voluntary efforts put in by Anganwadi Workers and Helpers and, therefore, continuous efforts have been made to improve their working conditions by revising their honorarium from time to time, extending facilities such as paid absence of maternity, insurance cover under the Anganwadi Karyakartri Bima Yojana, reservation of 25% of the vacant posts of Supervisors for Anganwadi Workers and reservation of 25% of the vacancies of AWWs for Anganwadi Helpers etc.

Popularisation of coconut water

*266. PROF. P.J. KURIEN: Will the Minister of FOOD PROCESSING INDUSTRIES be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are considering to popularise coconut water as a natural healthy drink in place of other artificial soft drinks;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether Government have received any proposal in this regard;

(d) if so, the details thereof; and

(e) the action taken by Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF FOOD PROCESSING INDUSTRIES (SHRI SUBODH KANT SAHAY): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. The Coconut Development Board under Ministry of Agriculture has been promoting tender Coconut Water as a health and functional food in place of other artificial drinks. Coconut Development Board in association with Defence Food Research Laboratory (DFRL), Mysore has developed a technology for preservation and packing of tender coconut water in pouches and aluminium cans without loss of its inherent qualities and taste. The shelf life of this product is 6 months under ambient conditions and 1 year in refrigerated conditions. The Board has transferred this technology to 8 entrepreneurs. The Board has financed 5 processing and preservation units of Tender Coconut Water in the States of Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and West Bengal. The Board also undertakes the promotional activities through electronic and print media and also participates in exhibitions, trade fairs etc. regularly.

Under plan scheme being operated by Ministry of Food Processing Industries, assistance is provided for setting up/expansion/modernisation of food processing industries. The assistance will be in the form of grant subject to 25% of the cost of plant & machinery and technical civil works up to maximum of Rs. 50 lakhs in General Areas and 33.33% upto Rs. 75 lakhs in difficult areas. Fruits & vegetable processing units using coconut as raw material are also eligible for assistance under the scheme.

(c) to (e) No proposal seeking financial assistance for processing of Coconut Water is pending with the Ministry.

Special scheme for education of Dalits

†*267. SHRI BALAVANT *ALIAS* BAL APTE:
SHRI SHREEGOPAL VYAS:

Will the Minister of HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that with a view to impart better education to Dalits of the entire country Government are preparing a special scheme;

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.